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ABSTRACT

Although community college leaders are regularly faced with decisions that have significant ethical import, they tend to have little if any formal preparation in how to make them. For the most part, administrators want to make decisions that improve the effectiveness of educational delivery, promote organizational health, are congruent with institutional policies, and are morally justified. This moral dimension can lead administrators either to become very empathetic, meticulously follow every rule, or trust in their own sense of personal integrity. Increasingly, professions are developing practical guidelines to guide practitioners in reasoning for moral choices. A model for moral decision-making, adapted from a guide for nurses to the field of educational administration, includes the following 10 steps: (1) determine if an ethical problem exists; (2) determine what additional factual information is needed; (3) identify the ethical issues in the situation; (4) define personal and professional moral stances; (5) identify the moral stances of others in the situation; (6) determine if the situation contains any conflicts of moral values; (7) determine who should make the decision; (8) identify a range of options for actions and the consequences of each option; (9) decide on a course of action and carry it out; and (10) review and evaluate the results of any action taken. (HAA)

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ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING:

GETTING DOWN TO PRACTICAL ISSUES

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The true character of leadership is not revealed until one is forced to choose when there is no "good" choice, but only unequally bad options. It is how one sorts through the bad choices that both reveals and often forms the character of our leaders most powerfully. This is true of leaders in all of our complex organizations, including community colleges, where we are regularly faced with decisions that have significant ethical import and little if any formal preparation in how to make them.

College administrators, for the most part, want to make decisions that are justified by their effectiveness in delivering educational programs to students, their manner of promoting organizational health, and their congruency with institutional policies and procedures. They also want to make morally justified decisions. While the former modes of justification readily lend themselves to more or less objective analysis, the moral dimension is regarded by many as too subjective, too personal for analysis. In practice it generally reduces to the decision with which the administrator feels most comfortable. In seeking this moral comfort zone, some administrators become very empathetic, others punctiliously follow rules, and still others trust in their own sense of personal integrity as if that would make whatever they decide right just because they did it. Perhaps we cannot improve upon the "gut feeling" approach: Immanuel Kant once remarked that the ordinary good-hearted person, innocent of moral theories, has as good a chance of hitting the mark in practice as the philosopher who can give an elaborate theoretical justification for an action. He added, however, that actions prompted simply by virtuous feelings have no moral worth because an essential component of moral reasoning would be absent.

For much of the twentieth century, ethicists ignored Kant's teaching. Logical positivism, in one version or other, dominated the scene in its insistence that all knowledge deserving of the name is scientific in character. Since moral judgments do not seem scientifically verifiable, positivism views them as mere expressions of emotion. About the only thing for ethicists to do is study how moral language functions because to pronounce judgment on an actual moral dilemma would simply be to vent one's feelings. "Breaking confidences is wrong" is equivalent to "Breaking confidences--Yuck!" One critic predicted the future of the field as "endless methodological foreplay." Beginning in the 1970's, however, the profession's prohibitions on actual moral judgment-making began to crumble, and by the 1980's a full scale revival of practical or applied ethics had occurred, with the field of medical ethics leading the way. Since then practically every branch of professional ethics has seen a renewed effort at reasoning one's way towards moral conclusions in particular cases. Models for reasoning in moral decision-making have proliferated and are traded back and forth from profession to profession. Today, in fact, anyone using the subjective or personal dimension of morality as a pretext for refusing to make reasoned moral judgments would seem, among ethicists, to be some sort of retrograde positivist.

In the spirit of borrowing from one field to another, we present a model for administrative moral decision-making adapted from the book *Bioethical Decision Making for Nurses* by Joyce E. Thompson and Henry O. Thompson. The Thompsons' decision model is pluralistic in the sense that it attempts to incorporate input from a number of aspects of moral choice that are emphasized in different moral theories: the importance of following rules, the importance of recognizing exceptions to rules, the importance of motives, the importance of consequences, the importance of individual rights, the importance of organizational welfare, and the importance of recognizing which decisions should be made by whom. Various moral theories have elevated each of these to supremacy, but the Thompsons want each to have its own place in a systematic process. As adapted to educational administrative decisions, the decision model includes the following ten steps.

Step One: Is there an ethical problem?

Review the situation to determine educational problems, decision needed, ethical components, and key individuals. The educational problems would have to be referenced to the college's mission statement as well as more specific programmatic goals and objectives. The ethical components of the situation could be noted by responses of the form "This or that *ought* to be done." Additionally, they would arise when there is a sense of dilemma: a choice between pursuing two incompatible goods or avoiding two separate evils, especially when no relevant hierarchy of goods or evils is clear. Finally, they might be identified when the basic rights of people in the situation are at stake.

Step Two: What additional factual information do I need to obtain?

Gather additional information to clarify the situation. Where moral dilemmas are present, people are often frightened, cynical, frustrated, angry, jealous, envious, and confused. They sometimes have reason to conceal or distort information, and they sometimes lie. This would be the stage to check the policy manual, get a legal opinion, consult with colleagues, and touch base with members of the community. One must resist the temptation to make a snap judgment based on information that might be very incomplete.

Step Three: What are the ethical issues in the situation?

Identify the ethical issues in the situation. Here (in part) is the Thompsons' way of sorting out the issues:

Issues of Principle

- Autonomy of students and professionals
- Beneficence (do good)
- Nonmaleficence (do not harm)

- Justice (fair allocation of resources)
- Truth-telling
- Informed consent
- The Golden Rule

Issues of Ethical Rights

- Right of privacy
- Right to education of one's own choice
- Right to information
- Right of academic freedom

Issues of Ethical Duties/Obligation

- Respect persons
- Be accountable for decisions
- Maintain competence
- Exercise informed judgment in professional practice
- Implement and improve standards of the profession
- Participate in activities contributing to the profession's knowledge base
- Safeguard students and colleagues from incompetent, unethical, and illegal practice of any person
- Promote efforts to meet the educational needs of the public
- Participate in the formulation of public policy regarding education

Issues of ethical loyalty

- Professional-student relationships
- Colleague relationships
- Relationships to superiors
- Respect for the rights of others to decide

Step Four: What is my own moral stance? that of my profession?

Define personal and professional moral positions. The personal part of this step amounts to soul-searching about one's deepest beliefs and attitudes. Sometimes it is called values clarification. The Thompsons recommend that one take the list of ethical issues listed in Step Three and, at least somewhat independently of the moral dilemma staring one in the face, ask oneself: "What is my basic stance on this issue? What justification do I have for that stance?" The professional part of this step involves reviewing published codes of ethics from professional organizations. Further, at this step one can compare/contrast one's personal and professional moral commitments, noting consistencies and inconsistencies.

Step Five: What are the moral stances of others in the situation?

Identify moral positions of key individuals involved. Ideally this would culminate with as much knowledge about the moral commitments of the other key individuals in the situation as one gained about oneself in Step Four. In response

to the question of why we should bother with the moral positions of others, the Thompsons remark that one can improve one's understanding of others and the situation (especially by finding areas of moral unease that one may have missed), one can show one's respect for others, one can avoid unilaterally imposing one's values on others, and one can begin to identify some solutions to the problem that would be morally satisfactory to everyone concerned. For both Step Four and Step Five the Thompsons note the availability of values clarification exercises and formal tests of moral development by psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg (the Moral Maturity Quotient) and James Rest (the Defining the Issues Test).

Step Six: Does the situation contain any conflicts of moral values?

Identify value conflicts, if any. Value conflicts can arise within individuals, among individuals, and among groups. There also can be conflicts of loyalty among individuals in a moral dilemma. Sometimes it helps to order values in a hierarchy, but such orderings can change quickly as new features of the situation become salient.

Step Seven: Who decides?

Determine who should make the decision. One way to initiate this step is to ask, "Who owns the problem?" If there is a conflict between two individuals, it's worth remembering that they do not exist in isolation: a solution satisfactory to them may be harmful to others. Part of this step may be for the college to clarify and render congruent its lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability.

Step Eight: What are the consequences of each of the options?

Identify the range of actions with anticipated outcomes. This may be a simple matter, but one should not miss an opportunity to exercise one's imagination by thinking "out of the box." One can draw on one's past experience of similar situations, experiences of other colleagues, and the professional literature. Also, one should not overlook the option of "no action."

Step Nine: What shall I do?

Decide on a course of action and carry it out. One dimension of this step is to incorporate the wisdom of basic ethical theories (such as utilitarianism, deontology, or natural law) which provide foundations for higher-level ethical principles, rules, and judgments. Another is to weigh the goods and harms that go with each of the candidate actions determined in Step Eight. Each person's handling of these factors will be different, but the common task for anyone making a decision that is morally justifiable. As one is drawn to an action which seems to be best in the circumstances, it may be helpful to imagine actually being

called on to justify the action by someone whose respect and esteem one did not want to lose. What would one say to such a person?

Step Ten: How does my decision look after I have acted?

Review and evaluate the results of the action. One reason for this step is avoid a false belief that one's action has solved the problem and the people involved are satisfied. Another action may be needed. Another reason is to learn everything one can from the given situation that might be transferred to a future similar case.

With the model presented and briefly explained, let us now use a case study to see how the model might be applied. Mary is the dean of a community college in which a member of the math department has received a year's leave of absence to complete doctoral work. She instructs John, the math division head, to hire a one-year full-time replacement. The college policy requires that the vacancy be posted for at least five business days, and the usual practice is to make sure the current adjunct instructors know of the vacancy, to assemble a faculty screening committee to review applications and interview finalists, and then to have the division head recommend two or three applicants for the dean to hire. Time is short, however, and John has a friend among the adjuncts who is known to be a very fine teacher. The announcement makes it up to bulletin board for only a couple of days. John tells his friend about the vacancy but makes no real effort to inform the other adjuncts. By the time word is getting out among the other adjuncts, John has already make a verbal offer to his friend, and tells the others that they need not apply. In spite of their precarious position as adjuncts, some of them tell John how upset they are by the unfairness of his process and go to Mary with their complaints. What should Mary do?